



BAKER'S DOZEN NEW FOOD PRODUCT LAUNCH CHECKLIST

Don't Go To
Market
Without these
13 Steps
Complete

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BUILD YOUR BRAND FOUNDATION Do you have a solid

brand foundation? Can you articulate your mission, vision, and values? If not, proceed no further until you can. These concepts are critical to the authenticity of the brand you build, and authenticity is in turn critical to success. While they don't need to be long, they do need to be unique.

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MAKE YOUR LOGO WORK HARD Does your logo work

as hard as you do? Your logo is the first step in your brand identity—it's a big step, and usually a fun one to design. Ask for versions in black and white, reverse, and any various color combination that makes sense for your brand. Make sure you have files for print and digital uses, and a vector file is essential for being able to scale your logo from the size of a bug to a billboard without it losing any resolution.

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KNOW THE LAY OF THE LAND Chances are strong

you wouldn't be committing to the expense of bringing a new product to market without knowing where you fit in the marketplace, but it's worth repeating that you need to know not only your competition, but also your own unique selling point (USP). What makes you different within the market? And what does success look like for you?

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SKUS: THREE ISN'T THE MAGIC NUMBER

We can't tell you how many food producers—some new, some experienced—come to us to discuss a new product launch with just one sku, or two, or three. Yes, sometimes it can work. But here's why we think it's often a mistake: Retailers need to have flavor options on the shelves. They aren't going to take a risk on a new product with just one flavor; they want to have several options.

So why doesn't three cut it? Well, they like to choose. Give them four options, so they can leave at least one behind. It's partly just psychology, but you also have to remember the broader marketplace. How many times have you seen different flavors of a product on offer at different stores within the same market area? Retailers know their shoppers have a lot of choice. They'll try to pick flavors that they think will work best for them and set them apart from other local retailers who may also carry your products. So, get creative, get testing and tasting, and launch with a minimum of four skus to give your product the best chance for success.

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PASS THE NO-BRAINER STORE SHELF TEST

You need a package that is assertive and jumps off the shelf. “Yes,” you say with an eye roll, “of course that’s what I want.” But how do you know you’ve achieved it? Do a no-brainer store shelf test. It sounds obvious, but it’s a step that’s often overlooked.

Start with a field trip to several retailers you’d like to see carry your products. Examine the shelving where your product would go. You might, perhaps, even take a few quick pictures of the shelves (though we didn’t tell you to do this! It’s against some store policies). Retail shelving is extremely busy. There are all kinds of statistics about how quickly consumers pass judgement on products, and why and from what distances they do it. These are worth looking up, but the biggest things to notice are the colors and structures of the other packages. Will yours stand out against them or blend in? Remember, shiny, flexible packaging will reflect light from overhead and can make it harder to see graphics and read copy. Think, too, about the overall billboard affect your products create when different skus are lined up next to one another. Do they work both individually and as a group (a group you might not get to choose the order of)?

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LOOK AS GOOD AS YOU TASTE Is your marketing collateral aligned with the quality of your product? As in, would your dream retailer consider your product based on its packaging alone? Sure, amazing products with not-so-hot packaging can make it into stores. But it's not a risk worth banking on. Retailers spend far more time checking out your product prior to buying than a consumer will, and consumers likely can't taste it ahead of purchase. While it's true the product should stand on its merit alone, that's just not how the real world works.

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MAKE A STRONG IMPRESSION Is your brand identity consistent across your business papers, trade show booth, sales sheet, social media, packaging, and website? This is a sneaky way of also asking if you also have all these assets ready to go. A strong, consistent brand presence gets more notice, and that means making sure consumers see the same look everywhere they encounter you. Budget-wise, it's also the best bang for your buck to take care of updating all assets for a launch.

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ADVERTISING IS ALIVE AND WELL The line between

marketing and advertising has gotten blurred in recent years. We're not talking your social media content strategy here—we're talking about paid ad placements, be it in newspapers and magazines or on Facebook and Google. Do you have a strategy and a budget for print and digital advertising? You might decide you have no budget for this, or that your market is best reached through other means, but be sure you've explored this idea before you dismiss it. If it really does have value, at least make a plan for how and when to address advertising in the future so that it remains part of your overall brand vision as you grow.

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CROSS YOUR T'S AND DOT YOUR I'S Time to lawyer

up! Make sure all of your assets are legally secure: name, identity, copyrights, trademarks, patents, and web URL. Know, too, how often you need to renew registrations to keep them valid and up-to-date. Many a company has lost a popular web URL after letting the domain name expire by mistake. Whether or not you choose to pursue action against anyone you think may be violating your rights is up to you; defense is the real name of this game.

This is also the time to vet your nutritional labeling claims with actual testing. In many cases, having lab tests done will result in more advantageous nutritional labeling than estimating will. Be sure to check and conform to the latest NLEA labeling requirements: Packaging print plates can be expensive, and no one wants to pay for a do-over.

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WHAT YOU SAY MATTERS AS MUCH AS HOW

YOU LOOK Great design is a huge asset to a product launch, but don't underestimate the power of what you have to say about your brand. A strong, consistent voice paired with a unique story to tell is the foundation of any great brand. Good copywriting is worth taking time over. Start by nailing down your story in five words, one sentence (those aren't the same thing!) and one paragraph. If you have lots more to say, you'll need to work on focusing it down, and if you can't think of anything at all to say, especially anything unique, you'll need to spend some time soul-searching and working with a great copywriter who can help you define your unique selling point. You have one, it's just finding the angle on it. Design and copy often evolve hand in hand, but if you have any must-have copy or graphic elements, think about how that will affect your overall available package real estate. Save long company histories and philosophies for websites, newsletters, and other platforms that give you more room to expound. Copy for your packaging should be about communicating selling points (is it gluten free?) and your essential story.

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DOES YOUR BUDGET MATCH YOUR GOALS?

The sixty-four thousand dollar question, sometimes literally. As designers, we frequently receive calls from potential clients who claim that money is no object, or that they're ready to do whatever it takes to launch a new product. After giving them a proposal that covers their bases, they often need to revise their thinking. This isn't because our prices are inflated or that we are looking to upsell them—it's because a logo and a package design are just two small steps in a big process. Some of the basics to cover across the board include: naming, logo and brand identity, legal fees, package sourcing and design, photography, food testing, copywriting, plate printing, printing costs, mock-ups, trade show booths, sales sheets, business papers, social media collateral, and websites.

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TIMING IS EVERYTHING

Do you know how long it will take to get to market? Just like knowing all the steps in a budget, be sure to build a realistic sense of how long it takes to achieve each of those items. Optimism is not your friend in this process. Factor in extra time for back-and-forths with vendors on design, copy, and print proof approvals; to print packaging; filling and shipping your new packages; and for production and shipping of elements like trade show booths and websites.

Then consider the bigger calendar—is there a trade show it makes sense to launch at? Plus, some products have heavy seasonal sales. Take ice cream: If your product isn't ready to promote by October, you may miss buyer presentations for the following summer. Lastly, it may be hard to reach your vendors and suppliers at certain times of the year, as many people take vacations in early summer or August, and mid-November through mid-January are often swallowed up by holidays.

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HAVE YOU CONSIDERED A PHASED LAUNCH?

Did you discover you don't have enough budget to launch regionally? Or with seven skus? Or in the perfect, custom package? Well, perhaps a phased launch is a good idea. Phases can happen in all kinds of ways, allowing you test the market more strategically before moving to bigger commitments:

NUMBER OF PRODUCT SKUS: start with four, then move to more

STORE TYPE: begin with independent markets, expand to small chains, and later move to mass market

GEOGRAPHICAL REGION: start locally, grow throughout your state, then region, and finally to national and international markets

PACKAGE STRUCTURE: begin with hand-applied labels on off-the-shelf packaging and then move to a custom structure later

PRODUCT MANUFACTURING: start from a kitchen-made product, move to a co-packer, and finally to an owned manufacturing facility.



**Need help
launching your product?
Let's chat.**

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MATRIX MARKETING GROUP // COLORADO: 1624 Market Street Denver, CO 80202 I// 303-35-1645